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SUBJECT: Update on Darfur Security and Humanitarian Access - July 11, 2006

¶1. Security Update:

¶1A. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), on July 8, a G-19 (SLM/Minni Minawi breakaway faction) senior field commander reported that the towns of Birmaza and Um Sidir were under attack by Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi (SLA/MM) forces. In Birmaza, a Sudanese government aircraft joined by a white government helicopter was observed circling the area heading in the direction of Muzbat, according to the G-19 field commander. A representative of AMIS stated on July 10 that rumors are circulating in North Darfur, in an apparent attempt to discredit the organization, that the helicopter had "AMIS" painted on its sides. AMIS also reported that the event was being referred to the Darfur Ceasefire Commission. In Um Sidir, SLA/MM forces, allegedly supported by Sudanese Armed Forces from El Fasher, attacked and captured the formerly G-19-controlled area, located 90 km north of El Fasher. The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) issued warnings to UN agencies and NGOs to suspend all humanitarian operations in these areas until further notice. OCHA has also expressed grave concern regarding the government's purported use of white helicopters, as the color white is generally reserved for parties neutral to the conflict. (Note: septel will address fighting in the Korma area, as well as allegations of rapes of IDPs by SLM/Minni Minawi's faction. End note.)

¶1B. On July 10, OCHA reported that since the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement on May 5, nine vehicles belonging to humanitarian agencies have been carjacked in the area around Kutum, North Darfur. OCHA expressed concern that further fragmentation of the SLA is creating major disruption to the provision of humanitarian assistance and putting humanitarian agencies at heightened risk.

¶2. Humanitarian Access Update:

¶2A. On July 10, USAID partner GOAL reported the cessation of operations in areas north of Kutum due to the ongoing fighting and insecurity around Birmaza. GOAL reports that its two health clinics in Kutum town, however, continue to function.

¶2B. These latest reports follow closely after several security incidents in Kassab camp forced USAID partners GOAL and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and UN World Food Program (WFP) implementing partner German Agro Action (GAA) to temporarily suspended activities on July 2. According to IRC, on June 30, 60 to 70 internally displaced persons (IDPs) burned down the government police station in Kassab and then set fire to the IRC Justice and Confidence Center (JCC) funded by the UN Development Program. The Kassab camp population and residents of surrounding villages are divided between supporters and opponents of the Darfur Peace Agreement. IRC staff are working to determine the motivation for the burning of the JCC. Unconfirmed reports relate that IDPs burned the JCC because it is believed to be associated with the Sudanese government and Darfur Peace Agreement dissemination activities. NGOs in the area have not yet resumed activities in the camp.

¶C. On July 10, Oxfam announced the official closure of its offices and operations in the Saraf Omra and Birkat Seira areas of North Darfur. Oxfam had suspended activities in the Saraf Omra area after the May 3 abduction of a local employee during a carjacking, and was threatening to permanently close operations for several weeks in an attempt to secure more information the employee's whereabouts and condition. Oxfam reported that all efforts to locate the man, his captors, or the stolen vehicle have failed. Oxfam has four other offices in North Darfur and continues to work throughout the rest of Darfur.

¶D. Due to ongoing insecurity in North Darfur, on July 10, WFP reported that 350,000 beneficiaries did not receive rations in the month of June. These included 250,000 people living in northern North Darfur and 100,000 others living in other areas. WFP also reported that as of June 28 the GAA warehouse located in Kutum was intact, a positive sign that armed groups are respecting humanitarian assets and that food security in the area has not deteriorated.

¶E. On June 27, Partner Aid International (PAI) lost communication with its field team operating in the village of Kera, located south of Tawila and west of Tabit in North Darfur. The same day, PAI received notification that staff members were safe, but the PAI health facility had been fired upon, communications equipment stolen including a Thuraya, and one vehicle taken by unknown armed men. UNDSS reports that residents in the area observed armed men on camels approach an NGO vehicle. The men reportedly hit the driver and drove the vehicle in the direction of Tabit. On June 28, PAI suspended all operations. PAI operated two health facilities in Kazan Tunjur and Kera. In a debriefing with the humanitarian community, PAI's departing health coordinator expressed his belief that the shots and carjacking were blatant attacks on their operations.

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